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SUBJECT: THIRD NATIONAL COCALERO CONGRESS A BUST

REF: A. LIMA 1062

- [1](#)B. LIMA 032
- [1](#)C. 04 LIMA 1381
- [1](#)D. 04 LIMA 947
- [1](#)E. 03 LIMA 983

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Third National Congress of the National Confederation of Agricultural Producers of the Coca Valleys (CONPACCP), held 3/14-18 outside Lima, was largely a bust. Cocaleros from the Monzon and parts of the Apurimac-Ene Valley (VRAE) did not attend and a group led by Elsa Malpartida walked out over leadership issues. While cocalero leaders flirt with extremist groups on the right and left (the Ethnocaceristas and the communist-led SUTEP teachers' union), these tentative linkages appear to be tactical in nature, fueled more by the participants' recognition of their own weakness operating separately than by any intent to join forces against the government. CONPACCP National Secretary Nancy Obregon presented a draft coca law to Congress calling for the suspension of all eradication until a new registry of licit growers can be developed, but this is unlikely to go anywhere. Press coverage was scanty and largely negative about the cocaleros. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) After earlier attempts at national congresses in 2003 and 2004 (Refs C and D), cocaleros at what was billed as the CONPACCP Third National Congress beginning 3/14 hoped to elect a national leader and advance a national agenda. Nancy Obregon, leader of the Huallaga Valley cocaleros, played a dominant role; she organized a strike (meaning blockade of roads around her area) last month (Ref A) based on false rumors that the GOP was fumigating coca crops. Elsa Malpartida, leader of cocaleros from the Tingo Maria area, was the other leader whose group was represented until she announced that she was quitting the Congress on 3/18 in a dispute over the election of new national leadership.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Representatives of some of the key growing areas for illegal coca -the Rio Apurimac and Monzon valleys - did not attend. Also absent were representatives from Cuzco, whose growers comprise most of the legally registered coca farmers; as the legal growers their interests in maintaining part of the status quo have diverged from the purely illegal growers. These groups did attend previous attempts at national cocalero congresses. According to GOP drug control agency DEVIDA officials, between 250 and 350 people attended the congress. Participants at various times included Bolivian Congressman and MAS party official Dionisio Nunez, Colombian cocalero Dina Perafan and Peruvian Congressmen Luis Guerrero, Aurelio Pastor, Carlos Chavez and Victor Valdez.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Following the congress, Obregon presented President of Congress Antero Flores-Araoz and Agriculture Committee Chairman Carlos Chavez a draft coca law as well as proposals to publicize coca health benefits and "industrialize" coca with a host of new products such as coca flour, toothpaste and gum. The proposed law would halt all eradication until the GOP register of licit production was updated and trading parastatal ENACO was reorganized to grandfather all current coca producers as legal growers. Chavez was reported in the press as agreeing to form a congressional working group from the Agriculture and Defense Committees to study problems affecting coca growers. (Comment: Congressman Luis Iberico, who heads the Defense Committee that handles coca issues, has made it clear that the cocaleros' proposals will not advance in his committee. Chavez' committee formed a similar working group last year, whose report was quickly filed and forgotten. End Comment.)

[1](#)5. (U) Other than two stories in prominent daily "La Republica" of Malpartida's departure, the general failure of the congress and Obregon's meeting with Flores-Araoz, press coverage of the cocalero congress was minimal compared to previous years. The efforts of Obregon and others to dramatize coca fumigation at the congress were unsuccessful, with no new press coverage of the unfounded fumigation rumors. (Note: The Mission has worked extensively with the Peruvian media to set the record straight on fumigation and other spurious cocalero positions; the efforts are paying

off. See Ref A. End Note.)

16. (U) The Cocaleros remain fractured into at least three factions delineated by geography. The most radical - meaning they want the unfettered ability to grow coca - were the growers from the Monzon Valley, part of Rio Apurimac, part of the Tingo Maria area and the San Gabon area of Puno Department. The second faction, led by Nancy Obregon of the Tocache area (southern San Martin department), espoused more of a middle ground with respect to some government limits on coca production, although they still advocate an immediate moratorium on eradication and the registration of all current growers as licit. The third faction encompasses the Cuzco Department areas of traditional coca cultivation; these growers have the most to gain from perpetuating established legal growing systems; growing evidence indicates that substantial illegal coca production is occurring in the areas where the licit growers are registered.

17. (U) The incarcerated Nelson Palomino, who before his arrest in 2003 had the potential to become a national cocalero leader (Ref E), reportedly sent telephonic messages to the congress calling for unity among the cocalero groups. Commentators interpreted his call as tacit support for Nancy Obregon's leadership over the more radical and fractious leadership of Elsa Malpartida. Palomino's call was ineffective in healing the divisions evident during this congress, illustrating his waning influence amongst cocaleros.

18. (SBU) Just prior to the congress, Bolivian congressman and MAS party official Dionisio Nunez visited Sicuani in Cuzco Department to explore creation of a political party along the lines of MAS. According to Mission contractors who are monitoring these efforts, the main Cuzco cocalero groups did not participate in this meeting. Nunez then attended the latter part of the Lima cocalero congress. MAS leader Evo Morales is reportedly planning to visit both Sicuani and Lima in April, when another national cocalero meeting is planned. At the congress, Obregon announced that she would meet with Morales in Sicuani. Monzon cocalero leader Ibursio Morales (who did not attend the congress) had previously indicated that he also would meet with Evo Morales in April.

19. (SBU) Cocaleros have sought over the months to establish a broader political base without much success. There was according to Mission contractors marginal participation by national teachers' union SUTEP representatives at this cocalero Congress. The new SUTEP leader, Caridad Montes seems more inclined than his predecessor to sympathize with cocaleros but there has been little evidence of direct support. Cocaleros have been exploring other organizations to give them support, but with little success. The Ethnocacerista movement recently broken up by the government (Ref B) made a point of trying to ally itself with cocaleros but only received the verbal support of Elsa Malpartida. The leftist political party Patria Roja has seemed a likely ally for cocaleros, but an effective partnership has failed to materialize; according to a coca expert used by the Mission for various coca research projects, Patria Roja has been too concerned with organizing its members to stand for municipal or provincial government posts to concern itself directly with the cocalero platform. There are reports of Sendero Luminoso remnants courting cocaleros but there is little hard evidence to support claims of an alliance between the two. Congressman Guerrero's Peru Ahora is the only major political party that has appeared to court the cocaleros, with few positive effects to show for either.

110. (U) Obregon, Malpartida and other cocalero leaders have not given up on national organizing. National meetings are planned for April and September. Small scale strikes continue: Rio Apurimac cocaleros began blocking roads March 14, Monzon cocaleros announced an indefinite strike beginning March 21 and growers in Tingo Maria (led by Luis Gonzaales) announced a peaceful march starting March 21. There have been no recent calls for a nationwide cocalero strike.

111. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite possible unifying themes such as the fumigation hoax and the prospect of a new coca law, the latest congress increased divisions between cocaleros. While cocalero leaders will continue to preach unity, personal rivalries should continue to dominate the cocalero movement. The inherent conflicts between the illegal growers in newer coca zones such as the Monzon and those established with legal cover in Cuzco also hamper an effective national cocalero lobby.

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